



The concept and relevance of ecotourism to Indigenous economic and human development in remote Australian communities

by

Julia Caldicott and Don Fuller

Centre for Enterprise Development and Research
Southern Cross University
Coffs Harbour Campus
in conjunction with the

Centre for Regional Tourism Research

Occasional Paper No. 6

September 2005

The concept and relevance of ecotourism to Indigenous economic and human development in remote Australian communities

by

Julia Caldicott and Don Fuller

Centre for Enterprise Development and Research
Southern Cross University
Coffs Harbour Campus
in conjunction with the

Centre for Regional Tourism Research

Occasional Paper No. 6

September 2005



Introduction

Ecotourism has been advocated within the academic literature as an important community economic development strategy due to the potential economic and social benefits that the sector can generate, while also protecting the environment. While it is widely recognised that Indigenous Australians suffer considerable social and economic disadvantage compared to other Australians, there remains significant challenges for Indigenous people in identifying suitable economic and commercial development opportunities directed at enhancing economic and human development within remote communities (Fuller and Parker 2002, Hughes and Warin 2005). Since the late 1980's there has been a proliferation of definitions of the term ecotourism. Through a review of the academic literature regarding definitions of ecotourism, this paper aims to present some conclusions about the suitability of ecotourism as a means of providing genuinely sustainable development opportunities for remote Australian Indigenous communities. For the purposes of this paper, sustainable development is defined as 'development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

The following sections of this paper outline the various ways in which the term ecotourism has been defined and the common dimensions contained within these definitions. The next section discusses the advocated benefits and the perceived costs of ecotourism as they are likely to apply to Indigenous community development. In the following section, important characteristics of remote Australian Indigenous communities likely to be relevant to the concept of ecotourism are detailed. The paper concludes by evaluating the suitability of ecotourism as a potential means of alleviating the considerable social and economic hardship endured by many Australian Indigenous people living within remote communities.

Definitions of ecotourism

There is a lack of consensus in the literature regarding the etymology of the term ecotourism. While a number of authors (Diamantis 1999: 96; Beeton 1998; Boo 1990 cited in Weaver 2001: 3) acknowledge the definition of Ceballos-Lascurain's in the late 1980's as the first, main contribution, other researchers suggest that the origin of the term can be traced back to Hetzer who wrote of ecotourism in 1965 (Bjork 2000: 190; Fennell 2003: 18). Commenting on the difference of opinion surrounding the origin of the term ecotourism, Fennell (2003: 19) suggests the term 'most likely has a convergent

evolution...where many places and people independently responded to the need for more nature travel opportunities in line with society's efforts to become more ecologically minded'. Environmental concerns and a desire for more nature based tourism experiences were also cited by Diamantis (1999), Honey (1999), and Budowski (in Weaver 2001) as the impetus for the evolution of the term ecotourism.

While some academics (Acott et al. 1998: 238) claim that a strong argument would be required to add to the existing plethora of ecotourism definitions, a continuance of creating variations of the term is predicted (Fennell 2001: 403). The consequence of so many definitions is an inability to instil meaning and standards in the ecotourism industry (Fennell 2001: 404), with some commentators labelling the term as 'a catch-cry for developers, politicians, bureaucrats and operators' (Hall cited in Blamey 1997: 116). Similarly, Cater (1994: 4) argues that because of the ambiguity surrounding the term ecotourism, it is being 'neatly co-opted by political and business interests to confer an aura of respectability to their activities'. Deliberate misrepresentation of the term is believed to lead to cynicism, and negatively affects the reputation of genuine ecotourism products (Weaver 2001: 98).

A number of factors have been cited to explain the reasons why a single, agreed definition has remained elusive, and is predicted to remain so. Ziffer (cited in Diamantis 1999: 97) suggests that ecotourism attempts to 'describe an activity, set forth a philosophy, while at the same time espouse a model of development', and it is this multi-purpose nature of the concept that prevents the adoption of a common definition. According to Blamey (1997), the multi-dimensional nature of existing ecotourism definitions, and the continuum of possibilities represented by each dimension, are the main factors preventing a single definition from being adopted. Blamey concludes that in attempting to establish an operational definition of ecotourism, 'subjective decisions cannot be avoided' (1997: 111) and that 'different definitions will be suited to different circumstances' (1997: 127). A number of researchers have questioned whether a single definition of ecotourism is necessary. Edwards et al. (cited in Fennell 2001: 416) suggest that a precise definition of ecotourism is 'perhaps unnecessary, due to the varied nature and demands of those associated with the industry'. Pearce and Blamey (1997 cited in Bjork 2000: 189-190) claim that 'it is futile to develop a single definition of a specific tourism form'.

However, on the basis that individuals who are requiring experiences of an ecotourism nature can be grouped due to their distinct needs, characteristics and behaviour, and respond in a similar way to marketing stimuli, it has been argued that ecotourism can be regarded as a distinct segment of the tourism market (Burton 1998 cited in Fennell 2001:

405; Blamey 1997: 115). While there are factors limiting the adoption of a single definition as described above, there would appear to be important reasons for some general acceptance of key definitional criteria. For example, it has been stated that ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of the world's largest industry (WTO 1998, cited in Dowling & Fennell 2003: 10). If this claim is to be substantiated, there would appear to be the need for a definition which reflects the distinguishing dimensions of the sector. The lack of an agreed definition of the term has been advanced as one of the main reasons for the discrepancies apparent in quantifying the significance of ecotourism as a key economic sector (Hawkins in Giannecchini 1993 cited in Fennell 2003: 83).

In addition to quantifying the relative size of the sector, a common definition of ecotourism has been seen as necessary for legal, planning and funding purposes, for gathering economic statistics and for market research purposes (Blamey 1997). A strict ecotourism definition that enables research into ecotourism from a marketing perspective is supported by Bjork (2000: 199), who claims that '[e]cotourism is demanding and expensive, and the risk of unsatisfied tourists is substantial owing to the diverse interpretation of what ecotourism stands for'. Importantly, a common definition which allows for the collection of valid and unambiguous information would assist remote Australian Indigenous communities to adequately assess whether their involvement in ecotourism enterprises would provide an effective means of sustainable development.

Since its inception, the term ecotourism has been defined and explained in a variety of ways. A number of researchers have explained ecotourism as a continuum. Laarman and Durst's (in Fennell 2003: 20) definition of ecotourism provides a reference to continuums of hard and soft dimensions of nature tourism (which they originally equated to ecotourism), based on the rigour of the experience and also the level of interest in natural history. Similarly, Acott et al. (1998) explain ecotourism as a continuum ranging from shallow to deep ecotourism, based on the principles of environmentalism and sustainability. Wight (1993 cited in Diamantis 1999: 94) also views ecotourism as a spectrum with a variety of products rather than a specific stance or product. Additionally, Lindberg's (cited in Fennell 2003: 35) classification of tourists as hard core, dedicated, mainstream, and casual can be viewed as a continuum using the variables of dedication and time. Another continuum can be seen in Honey's (1999) description of products which refer to products which include the "pillars" or core dimensions of ecotourism as opposed to ecotourism 'lite', products which employ minor environmentally friendly, cost saving measures (such as not washing laundry each day). The premise that ecotourism is a continuum or spectrum, has a number of implications for the implementation of the concept, including product development, marketing, operating, and accreditation.

Other researchers have explained the concept of ecotourism in relation to other forms of tourism. While it is beyond the scope of the current paper to discuss these in detail, some of the frequently discussed relationships between ecotourism and other forms of tourism are briefly outlined. Boo (1990 cited in Blamey 1997: 110) for example, equates ecotourism with nature tourism, while others maintain that ecotourism is a subset of nature-based tourism (Ceballos-Lascurain 1993 cited in Bjork 2000: 198; Weaver 2001: 16; Fennell 2003: 25; Laarman & Durst 1993 cited in Fennell 2003: 21; Goodwin 1996 cited in Fennell 2003: 21). The core dimensions thought to differentiate ecotourism from nature based tourism include an educative component and a sustainability component (Blamey 1995 cited in Fennell 2003: 21) and the ethical nature of the experience (Kutay 1989, Wight 1993a, Hawkes and Williams 1993, Wallace & Pierce 1996, cited in Fennell 2003: 21). Additionally, the term ecotourism has been used interchangeably with sustainable tourism but Weaver (2001: 20) argues that this is erroneous since ecotourism should be regarded as a subset of sustainable tourism, given that sustainability is one of the core criteria for ecotourism. Similarly, Bjork (2000: 197) argues that '[e]cotourism is a sustainable and specific tourism. Sustainable tourism, on the other hand, consists of principles that all tourism forms should adapt to'. Ecotourism has also been defined as distinct from adventure tourism, on the basis of the types of activity pursued, with an element of risk or uncertainty associated with the latter (Fennell 2003: 29; Weaver 2001: 17). Additionally, unlike ecotourism, adventure tourism is not always nature based and has no inherent requirement for sustainability (Weaver 2001: 17).

The literature concerning ecotourism's relationship to cultural tourism is especially interesting, given the focus of the authors of this paper upon remote Australian Indigenous communities. Fennell (2003: 25-26) deliberately excludes the cultural dimension from the definition of ecotourism on the basis that any cultural component included in the experience is likely to be a secondary motivation. If this were not the case, the experience would be deemed cultural tourism. However, as noted by Weaver (2005: 440) '[m]ost definitions [of ecotourism] also recognise the importance of associated cultural attractions, both contemporary and relict'. Furthermore, Cater (1994: 4) argues that the natural and cultural landscapes are indivisible, given that the 'natural landscapes are in fact, cultural, having evolved over thousands of years of Indigenous land management practice' (Cater 1994: 4). In reference to destinations which are or were occupied by Indigenous people, Weaver (2005: 441) claims that the 'inclusion of a cultural component is a logical qualification to the "nature-based" focus, given that few if any places are completely free from human influences'. Additionally, recognising and incorporating the cultural component rather than just the non-human element provides a more holistic and realistic experience for ecotourists (Weaver 2001: 10).

Similarities within existing definitions of ecotourism

Despite the diversity of definitions of ecotourism, a number of common dimensions are apparent. Bjork (2000: 190) comments that although ecotourism is not a homogenous phenomenon from a global perspective 'a common core idea can be elicited that includes a handful of central dimensions'. Furthermore, Fennell (2001: 417) suggests that in the absence of a single definition of ecotourism it is the common dimensions, or as Fennell describes 'the root variables', which may provide the foundation for future definitions, while allowing emphasis on particular local conditions. Such core ideas and root variables are likely to prove most helpful when applying the concept to remote Australian Indigenous communities.

In Bjork's (2000: 191) study, the author comments that although several different definitions were examined, the core dimensions are similar. Bjork (2000: 191) expresses the core dimensions of ecotourism as: '[t]he area the ecotourists are visiting is (or should be) undisturbed, and nature and culture are in focus. The tourist should admire, study and enjoy these elements in a non-degrading manner' (emphasis added). Similarly, the results of Fennell's (2001: 416) content analysis reveal that variables such as 'natural areas', 'culture' and 'education' were frequently used within ecotourism definitions. However, while Bjork's results tend to indicate a passive stance in regards to the behavioural dimension of ecotourism occurring in a 'non-degrading manner', Fennell's results suggest a more active position with 'conservation' and 'benefits to locals' being frequently mentioned in the definitions that were analysed. Likewise, Orams (cited in Curtin 2003: 188; Diamantis 1999: 95) argues that ideally the behavioural dimension of ecotourism should be active rather than passive, whereby the actions of ecotourists contribute to the protection of the environment rather than merely seeking to minimise damage.

The five frequently cited dimensions (namely, natural areas; culture; education; conservation; and benefits to locals) of ecotourism definitions as outlined by Fennell's content analysis are also listed as common features of ecotourism by Honey and Stewart (2002 cited in Charnley 2005: 75). While incorporating the more active perspectives of 'contributions to conservation', and 'economic benefits and political empowerment for local communities', Honey and Stewart (2002 cited in Charnley 2005: 75), in a similar manner to Bjork (2000), maintain that a core dimension should be 'minimal impact on the environment and local people'. In an analysis of thirteen ecotourism definitions, Diamantis (1999: 101) identifies three common elements: natural-based, educational and sustainable management that includes economic and/or socio-cultural issues. Further explanation by Diamantis reveals that 'the natural-based

component of ecotourism is based on biological, physical and cultural features' (Diamantis 1999: 104, emphasis added). Blamey (1997, 2001 cited in Weaver 2001: 7) also distilled a variety of definitions to identify the same three core dimensions: a nature-based element, an educational or learning component, and a requirement for the notion of sustainability. In the view of the authors of this paper, factors such as contributions to conservation and economic benefits to local communities are important components of sustainability. As such, we would consider the common dimensions of ecotourism as outlined by Diamantis, Blamey and Weaver as providing a useful framework on which to capture the core elements of the term. As discussed above, cultural features are integral to the ecotourism experience, and as such this aspect should be elucidated, rather than incorporated within the nature based component. In the context of Indigenous communities in particular, it is essential that the importance of culture be recognised. In this sense, the necessary common dimensions of the term include 1) a natural and cultural component; 2) education; and 3) sustainability.

Table 1 lists a range of definitions of ecotourism, in which a number of common dimensions are evident.

Advocated Benefits and Perceived Costs of Ecotourism

Although much of the academic literature regarding ecotourism makes reference to its potential for generating economic benefits while simultaneously protecting the environment, rarely are the potential benefits and costs of ecotourism outlined clearly. A summary of the potential benefits and costs of ecotourism is outlined in Table 2. More detailed discussions can be found in Weaver (2001), Diamantis (1999) and Fennell (2003).

Given the focus of this paper on evaluating ecotourism as a means of alleviating social and economic hardship within remote Australian Indigenous communities, the list of potential benefits, particularly economic and socio-cultural, is important. Such economic benefits are seen to be fundamental to social and human development. However, the lack of empirical evidence of ecotourism's economic benefits is a matter for concern. Taylor et al. (2003: 977) note that 'a few economists have assessed ecotourism's potential for generating income, but economic research into ecotourism's impacts and its potential for creating conservation incentives is sparse'. The lack of quantitative research into the economic impacts of ecotourism is thought to be an important reason why argument persists as to the actual economic benefits available to local residents from ecotourism based activities (Taylor et al. 2003).

Table 1
Selected Definitions of Ecotourism

SOURCE	DEFINITION
Hetzer (1965 cited in Bjork 2000: 190)	Tourism based principally upon natural and archaeological resources such as birds and other wildlife, scenic areas, reefs, caves, fossil sites, archaeological sites, wetlands, and areas of rare or endangered species.
Ceballos-Lascurain (1987 cited in Sirikaya <i>et al.</i> 1999: 169)	Travelling to relatively undisturbed areas or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas.
Boo (1991 cited in Sirikaya <i>et al.</i> 1999: 169)	Ecotourism/nature-oriented tourism refers to tourism to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific objective of admiring, studying and enjoying the scenery and its flora and fauna.
Ziffer (1989 cited in Sirikaya <i>et al.</i> 1999: 169)	A form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation, and sensitivity. The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents. Ecotourism also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development.
Fennell (2003: 25)	Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas.
Bjork (2000: 196-197)	An activity where the authorities, the tourism industry, tourists and local people co-operate to make it possible for tourists to travel to genuine [sic] areas in order to admire, study and enjoy nature and culture in a way that does not exploit the resource, but contributes to sustainable development.
The Ecotourism Society (cited in Western 1993: 8)	Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.
Mvula (2001: 395)	Travel to natural areas that has low environmental and social impacts and which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats through making a direct contribution to conservation and by providing income to the local community sufficient for local people to value, and hence protect, their natural heritage area as a source of income. Inherent in this is that the local community are fully aware of the source of this income.
Blamey (1997: 125)	An ecotourism experience is one in which an individual travels to what he or she considers to be a relatively undisturbed natural area that is more than 40km from home, the <i>primary</i> intention being to study, admire, or appreciate the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas.

The economic impacts of whale watching, a subset of wildlife tourism, 'which sits neatly in the realms of marine and ecotourism' (Curtin 2003: 175), are claimed to be significant for the local Indigenous population of Kaikoura in New Zealand. Since commercial whale watching commenced in the late 1980's, large increases in revenue and direct and indirect employment in Kaikoura have been recorded. As a result, it is claimed that 'local Maoris have moved from a position of powerlessness and low socio-economic status to become a major employer and a strong economic force in the community' (Curtin 2003: 183). In addition to the direct benefits derived from tourism in Kaikoura, wider socio-economic benefits are believed to include education and training for Maori adults and young people, and the provision of income to the local 'marae' (communal tribal community)' (Curtin 2003: 183). Similarly, positive economic impacts were illustrated by a micro economy-wide analysis of nature-tourist impacts in the Galapagos Islands by Taylor et al. (2003). However, Taylor et al. suggest that the results indicate 'difficult trade-offs between the objectives of preserving fragile ecosystems and insuring the participation of locals in the economic benefits of nature tourism' (Taylor et al. 2003: 993).

Table 2
Potential Benefits and Costs of Ecotourism

Environmental Impacts	
DIRECT BENEFITS	DIRECT COSTS
• Incentive to protect natural environments	• Impacts of permanent environmental restructuring and generation of waste residuals
• Incentive to rehabilitate modified environments	• Impacts of tourist activities (wildlife observation, hiking, introduction of exotic species)
• Provide funds to manage and expand protected areas	
• Ecotourists assist with habitat maintenance and enhancement	
• Ecotourist serve as environmental watchdogs	
INDIRECT BENEFITS	INDIRECT COSTS
• Exposure to ecotourism fosters environmentalism	• Effects of induced environmental restructuring (e.g. unplanned development in adjacent villages due to migration for ecotourism related employment)
• Areas protected for ecotourism provide environmental benefits	• Exposure to less benign forms of tourism
	• Problems associated with the economic valuation of 'nature'

Continued on following page

Economic Impacts	
DIRECT BENEFITS	DIRECT COSTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate revenue and employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start-up expenses (acquisition of land, establishment of protected areas, superstructure, infrastructure)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide economic opportunities for peripheral regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going expenses (maintenance of infrastructure, promotion, wages)
INDIRECT BENEFITS	INDIRECT COSTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High multiplier effect and indirect revenue and employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue uncertainties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulation of mass tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue leakage due to imports and non-local participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports cultural and heritage tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas protected for ecotourism provide economic benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to wildlife
Socio-cultural Impacts	
DIRECT BENEFITS	DIRECT COSTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters community stability and well-being through economic benefits and local participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and social intrusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic and spiritual benefits and enjoyment for residents and tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imposes an elite alien value system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible to a broad spectrum of the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erosion of local control (foreign experts, in-migration of job seekers)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local inequalities and internecine disputes
	INDIRECT COSTS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for local resentment or antagonism
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist opposition to aspects of local culture and lifestyle (e.g. hunting, slash/burn agriculture)

Source: Weaver (2001: 97-126)

Implementing the concept of ecotourism

Ensuring local residents obtain actual economic benefits from ecotourism activities is one of the key challenges of implementing the concept of ecotourism. In Mvula's (2001: 395) definition of ecotourism, emphasis is placed on the local community being fully aware that the natural resource that serves as the attraction of ecotourism is a major source of income, and needs to be protected. Ashley and Roe (1998 cited in Mvula 2001: 395) argue that the type of community involvement in ecotourism influences the benefits and costs to the host community. However, Garrod (2003) argues that rather than mere community 'involvement', full and effective participation of local communities in the planning and management of ecotourism projects is required. Garrod (2003: 34) outlines the difference between involvement and participation. The former may simply refer to the provision of alternative employment opportunities for local residents, while the latter

infers a much greater level of collaboration in the decision making processes involved in planning and managing ecotourism projects.

Planning, as with any project, is advocated by many to be a crucial component for the successful implementation of an ecotourism project. Environmentally appropriate policies and planning is seen as the key to capitalising on the potential benefits of ecotourism developments by Dowling and Fennell (2003: 14). Similarly, planning and monitoring, together with an educational provision as well as a certain level of local control, is regarded by Ayala (1995 cited in Diamantis 1999: 113) as necessary to maximise the benefits while minimising the costs of ecotourism ventures. Furthermore, Ceballos-Lascurain (1993: 13) argues that ecotourism requires a multidisciplinary approach, careful planning involving both physical and managerial aspects and strict guidelines designed to guarantee sustainable operation.

The means of marketing, in particular the advertising of ecotourism products, has been investigated by a number of researchers. Weaver (2001: 97) comments that in addition to products and activities which do meet the core criteria of ecotourism, others deliberately or inadvertently misrepresent the term. Deliberate misrepresentation occurs when the term ecotourism is used inappropriately to 'greenwash' a product (Weaver 2001: 97); a profitable marketing ploy used to convey a misleading image of environmental responsibility (Wight 1993 in Weaver 2001: 97). The frequency of misrepresentation of the term has resulted in many marketers, operators and agents refusing to use the ecotourism label because of the negative image it has gained and the confusion surrounding the precise meaning of the term (Preece et al. 1995 cited in Fennell 2003: 94).

Among the reasons that misrepresentation of the term ecotourism is commonplace is a lack of effective accreditation schemes that are familiar to the public (Weaver 2001: 98). While there are many regional, national and international certification programs for ecotourism, they vary in quality and rigour (Honey 2003), lacking comparable standards and criteria (Font 2003: 213). Although certification has the potential to reduce tourism's negative environmental and social impacts (Font 2003: 213), this quality control mechanism is not without its limitations. Buckley (2003: 81) describes the lack of full and transparent accounting of all the costs as well as the benefits of an ecotourism product as a major weakness of most tourism eco-certification schemes. An example of this weakness is illustrated where a company can gain green ticks for hiring interpretative guides, while simultaneously causing a loss of biodiversity through disturbance in a national park (Buckley 2003: 81). International recognition of the problems associated with certification programs lacking common standards and criteria, has instigated a

'process toward rationalizing, harmonizing, and assessing the various certification schemes and building support for an accreditation body for the tourism industry' (Honey 2003). It is believed that the proposed global tourism accreditation body, entitled the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council, would 'raise the standards of sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programmes, while delivering benefits from joint marketing, training and information sharing' (Font 2003: 217).

The Relevance of Ecotourism Activities to Indigenous Community Development

It has been widely documented that Indigenous people in Australia suffer considerable social and economic disadvantage compared to other Australians (see for example, Altman and Nieuwenhuysen 1979; Stanley 1985; Ellana et al. 1988; Daly 1995; Fuller and Parker 2002). Contributing to the social and economic hardship endured by many Indigenous people is the historically high level of unemployment among Indigenous people. The main causes for this high level of unemployment are a lack of job skills, lack of education and training, and limited employment opportunities (Fuller and Parker 2002). In order to overcome the high levels of unemployment, Indigenous people need greater access to employment opportunities and the mainstream labour market. An important avenue for alleviating the economic and social disadvantage of Indigenous communities is likely to come from the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and managed small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), operated for the purpose of making a profit for their owners (Johnston 1991; Fuller and Parker 2002). Research conducted in remote communities in Northern Australia has found that opportunities for Indigenous people to establish small enterprises do exist in remote communities. However, to successfully exploit these opportunities, Indigenous people are required to overcome substantial barriers. Indigenous people tend to lack the education and training necessary to operate, or be employed by, a small enterprise. In addition, most Indigenous people who are prospective SME owner-operators have limited access to the finance necessary to establish a small enterprise. While opportunities for business activity do exist, SMEs in remote areas are required to rely on relatively small communities that have limited disposable income.

While a single definition of the term ecotourism would be beneficial for planning and funding purposes for Indigenous people considering establishing an ecotourism SME, consensus on the precise meaning remains elusive. Despite the range of ecotourism definitions, three core dimensions of the term are apparent. As discussed, these include a natural and cultural component, an educational or learning component, and a requirement for sustainability. Remote Australian Indigenous communities possess a

number of attributes that would enable them to participate in ecotourism enterprises based on such criteria.

First, Indigenous people own substantial land assets with considerable natural and cultural significance which would be suitable for ecotourism experiences. Second, Indigenous people possess an extensive knowledge of the land and of the cultural and spiritual significance of the natural environment. They are prepared to share such knowledge with Non-Indigenous people within certain knowledge domains. This would provide an important element to the educative process sought by many Non-Indigenous people. Thirdly, sustainability of the environment has been an integral component of the spiritual, cultural and economic knowledge system of Indigenous people for many thousands of years. As a result principally of these factors, ecotourism has been advanced as 'a strategy to help address economic and social problems in local communities, and as an appropriate and effective tool of environmental conservation' (Garrod 2003: 33). Similarly, the Quebec Declaration states that '...ecotourism, if managed in a sustainable manner, can represent a valuable economic opportunity for local and indigenous populations and their cultures and for the conservation and sustainable use of nature for future generations' (cited in Honey 2003: 14). While there are examples of host communities which have benefited from ecotourism, there is a lack of quantitative research into the economic impacts of this form of tourism. Such empirical evidence is necessary to facilitate the development of ecotourism enterprises by Indigenous people in remote Australian Indigenous communities. Quantitative research into the impacts of ecotourism would potentially assist Indigenous people to decide whether they wish to be involved in such activities. If so, it would also assist in the creation of the necessary business planning for such enterprises.

While remote Australian Indigenous communities possess important characteristics required for the establishment of an ecotourism enterprise, the potential costs of ecotourism need to be evaluated alongside the advocated benefits. Commenting on ecotourism in National Parks, Cordell (1993 cited in Jenkins and Wearing 2003: 220) states 'evidence from Kakadu and elsewhere indicates that tourism is of marginal economic benefit to indigenous people. It may even leave them worse off'. Tourism has a considerable potential for destructive intrusions into Indigenous community life. Costs may include environmental damage, tourism trespass into Indigenous communities and associated invasion of privacy. Along with these aspects is the considerable potential for cultural clashes relating to differences in attitudes and value systems. Many Indigenous people for example, find the many questions asked by Non-Indigenous tourists about Indigenous cultural aspects as offensive and an inappropriate means of transferring knowledge about land and ceremonial matters. Hall (1994: 154) however, recognises

that ecotourism does have a role to play in economic development and environmental conservation, but argues that this should not occur at the expense of the host communities' values and culture. Furthermore, Hall claims that 'to neglect the social dimension of development and peoples' relationship to their environment is in opposition to the principles of sustainable development which ecotourism is supposedly supporting and implementing' (1994: 154).

Conclusions and Implications

Despite remote Australian Indigenous communities possessing important characteristics which align with the common dimensions of ecotourism, there are also a number of obstacles which would need to be overcome in order to establish and operate an Indigenous owned and operated ecotourism venture. While rich in ecotourism assets in terms of land ownership, many remote Australian Indigenous people lack the finance necessary to establish an ecotourism enterprise. Indigenous people face difficulties accessing finance through normal commercial channels due to lower income and asset levels, a lack of familiarity with the procedures of financial institutions and the inability to prepare formal business and financial plans that are often required (Fuller and Parker 2002). A lack of education and specific training required to own and effectively manage an ecotourism enterprise is another significant impediment for remote Indigenous people. Skills and knowledge would be required in a number of areas including: business and strategic planning, financial management and control, marketing, technical skills to maintain the capital equipment required for the ecotourism enterprise, as well as knowledge of the tourism sector. Cultural differences between remote Indigenous people and visitors may also create tension which will need to be overcome in order to deliver a satisfactory ecotourism experience. Ideally, ecotourists should respect the culture of the host community, but cultural unawareness by both the host and the visitor can lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

This paper has shown that ecotourism activities are likely to provide potential for economic and human development within remote Australian Indigenous communities. Where communities do not have the capacity to undertake all the tasks necessary to establish and operate a commercially successful ecotourism enterprise it will be necessary for Indigenous people to establish partnerships with other stakeholders within a region to overcome this constraint. Field based research within remote Indigenous communities in Northern Australia indicate that many Indigenous people are keen to establish such business partnerships where mutual benefits can be obtained (Fuller and Parker 2002).

References

Acott, T.G., La Trobe, H.L. and Howard, S.H. 1998. 'An evaluation of deep ecotourism and shallow ecotourism', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 6 (3): 238-253.

Altman, J.C. and Nieuwenhuysen, J. 1979. *The Economic Status of Australian Aborigines*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beeton, S. 1998. *Ecotourism: A Practical Guide for Rural Communities*. Australia: LandLinks Press.

Bjork, P. 2000. 'Ecotourism from a conceptual perspective, an extended definition of a unique tourism form', *The International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2: 189-202.

Blamey, R. 1997. 'Ecotourism: The search for an operational definition', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 5 (2): 109-130.

Buckley, R. 2003. 'Environmental inputs and outputs in ecotourism: Geotourism with a positive triple bottom line?', *Journal of Ecotourism*, 2 (1): 76-82.

Cater, E. 'Introduction' in E. Cater and G. Lowman (eds.) 1994. *Ecotourism: a sustainable option?* England: John Wiley & Sons.

Ceballos-Lascurain, H. 'Ecotourism as a worldwide phenomenon' in K. Lindberg and D.E. Hawkins (eds.) 1993. *Ecotourism: A Guide for Planners and Managers*. North Bennington: The Ecotourism Society.

Charnley, S. 2005. 'From nature tourism to ecotourism? The case of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania', *Human Organisation*, 64 (1): 75-88.

Curtin, S. 2003. 'Whale-watching in Kaikoura: sustainable destination development?', *Journal of Ecotourism*, 2 (3): 173-195.

Daly, A.E. 1995. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Australian Labour Market: 1986 and 1991*, ABS Cat. No. 6253.0., Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

- Diamantis, D. 1999. 'The concept of ecotourism: Evolution and trends', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2 (2 & 3): 93-122.
- Dowling, R. and Fennell, D. 'The context of ecotourism policy and planning', in D.A. Fennell and R.K. Dowling (eds.) 2003. *Ecotourism Policy and Planning*. Oxon: CABI Publishing.
- Ellana, L., Loveday, P., Stanley, O. and Young, E.A. 1988. *Economic Enterprises in Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory*, Monograph, Australian National University: NADU, Darwin.
- Fennell, D. 2001. 'A content analysis of ecotourism definitions', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 4(5): 403-421.
- Fennell, D. 2003. *Ecotourism* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Font, X., Sanabria, R. and Skinner, E. 2003. 'Sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification: Raising standards and benefits', *Journal of Ecotourism*, 2 (3): 213-218.
- Fuller, D. and Parker, L. 2002. *Indigenous Economic Development in Northern Australia: Opportunities and Constraints*. Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press.
- Garrod, B. 2003. 'Local participation in the planning and management of ecotourism: A revised model approach', *Journal of Ecotourism*, 2 (1): 33-53.
- Hall, C.M. 'Ecotourism in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific: Appropriate tourism or a new form of ecological imperialism?', in E. Cater and G. Lowman (eds.) 1994. *Ecotourism: a sustainable option?* England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Honey, M. 1999. 'Treading lightly? Ecotourism's impact on the environment', *Environment*, 41 (5): 4-16.
- Honey, M. 2003. 'Protecting Eden; setting green standards for the tourism industry', *Environment*, 45 (6): 8-22.
- Hughes, H. and Warin, J. 2005. 'A new deal for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in remote communities', *Issue Analysis*, 54: 1-20.

Jenkins, J. and Wearing, S. 'Ecotourism and protected areas in Australia', in D.A. Fennell and R.K. Dowling (eds.) 2003. *Ecotourism Policy and Planning*. Oxon: CABI Publishing.

Johnston, E. 1991. *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report, Volume 4*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Mvula, C. 2001. 'Fair trade in tourism to protected areas - A micro case study of wildlife tourism to South Luangwa National Park, Zambia', *The International Journal of Tourism Research*, 3 (5): 393-405.

Sirakaya, E., Sasidharan, V. and Sönmez, S. 1999. 'Redefining ecotourism: the need for a supply-side view', *Journal of Travel Research*, 38: 168-172.

Stanley, O. 'Economic development problems in remote Aboriginal communities', in P. Loveday and D. Wade-Marshall (eds.) 1985. *Economy and People in the North*, Monograph, Australian National University: NADU, Darwin.

Taylor, J.E., Dyer, G.A., Stewart, M., Yunez-Naude, A. and Ardila, S. 2003. 'The economics of ecotourism: a Galapagos Islands economy-wide perspective', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 51 (4): 977-997.

Weaver, D. 2001. *Ecotourism*. Australia: John Wiley & Sons.

Weaver, D. 2005. 'Comprehensive and minimalist dimensions of ecotourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32 (2): 439-455.

Western, D. 'Defining ecotourism', in K. Lindberg and D.E. Hawkins (eds.) 1993. *Ecotourism: A Guide for Planners and Managers*. North Bennington: The Ecotourism Society.

World Commission on Environment and Development 1987. *Our Common Future*. London: Oxford University Press.